



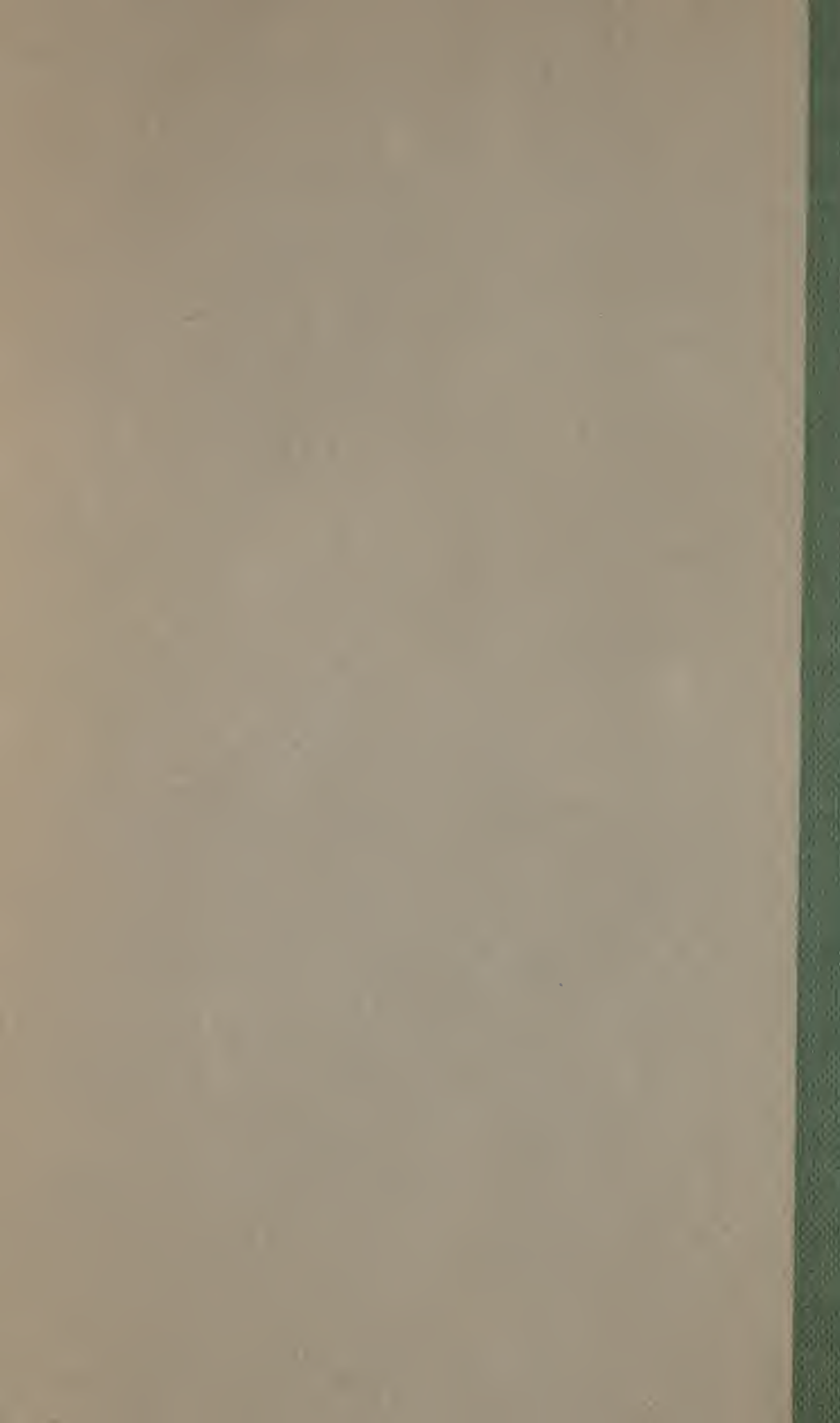
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Bailey, Samuel. Essays on the
pursuit of truth

Thompson, Thomas Perronet

Review of Samuel Bailey's Essays
on the pursuit of truth.



T. Perronet Thompson's

Review of

Samuel Bailey's

Essays

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Pursuit of Truth.

Being Article XI of

The Westminster Review

for October 1829

ridiculous, disgusting, violent and laughable scenes commemorated in these volumes [vol. ii. p. 222]. The same observations may apply to Swift. Lovers in verse are not, therefore, poets. Swift's victims were beautiful accomplished women. He was clever, and could forge even rhythm and rhyme in his head, but the spirit of poetry disdained to take up its abode in his coarse-grained, ill-fashioned, hard-natured soul. Of these modern moderns the greatest portion of interest has been thrown over the rustic loves of Burns,—thus redeeming a poet's name,—shewing that the high born and bred, and clever lady Mary Montague, Voltaire and his *femme terrible*, and Swift, were lovers, but not poets, and therefore 'neither gentle, imaginative, nor interesting; while the lowly-born Burns, being instinct with Apollo's fire, sheds a glory over the humble objects of his attachment, which a princess might envy [vol. ii. p. 195]. Monti and his wife are also an interesting pair [vol. ii. p. 209], and we are charmed by the sweetness displayed in the loves of Klopstock and Meta [vol. iii. p. 154], though there is a Germanism about it, which giving effeminacy to the man, dims the picture by a mist of what appears to us almost like affectation.

The authoress sums up her work by a glance at the poets of the day, and their loves—a chapter as well left out, for she, fearing to tread on forbidden ground, tells us, in fact, nothing. Unable to throw the ideality of distance over the near and distinct—and afraid, justly so—for the practice of shewing up our friends is the vice and shame of our literature,—of dragging into undesired publicity the modest and retiring,—she does not even bestow the interest of reality upon her undefined sketches. Besides, there are certain names she dreads to mention. May we not say, in the somewhat hacknied phrase of Tacitus: *Sed perfulgebant, eo ipso quod nomines eorum non visebantur?*

ART. XI.—*Essays on the Pursuit of Truth, on the Progress of Knowledge, and on the Fundamental Principle of all Evidence and Expectation.* By the Author of 'Essays on the Formation and Publication of Opinions.' London. R. Hunter. 1829. 8vo. pp. 302.

IF a man could be offered the paternity of any comparatively modern books that he chose, he would not hazard much by deciding, that next after the 'Wealth of Nations' he would request to be honoured with a relationship to the 'Essays on the Formation and Publication of Opinions.*' It would have

* London, R. Hunter. 1826. 8vo. pp. 320.

been a glorious thing to have been the father of the mathematics of grown gentlemen;—to have saved nations from fraud, by inventing the science of detecting the pillage of the few upon the many, the ‘practical men’ protesting the while against its inferences, as defaulting purse-bearers protest against arithmetic. It would have been a splendid triumph, to have set up the ‘lever which will move the world;’ and have originated the process of discovery, which heads of Houses are called on to prohibit, lest knowledge should become insupportable, and Oxford ‘man have too much light.’ But next to this, it would have been a pleasant and an honourable memory, to have written a book so *totus teres atque rotundus*, so finished in its parts and so perfect in their union, as the ‘Essays on the Formation of Opinions.’ Like one of the great statues of antiquity, it might have been broken into fragments, and each separated limb would have pointed to the existence of some interesting whole, of which the value might be surmised from the beauty of the specimen.

Another book from the same author, must have a powerful claim to the attention of those who have been delighted with the first. It is in fact but the prolongation of the other; or relates to subjects so closely joined, that it may be a question whether the two make two existences or one. The first Essay is on the pursuit of truth, and on the *duty* of inquiry.’ There is a fund of novelty in that word *duty*. It is not every body that has found it out, but still the truth is, that what men have hitherto been taught, is that it is their duty to accept of certain propositions *without* inquiry; or which comes to the same thing, that their inquiries shall be directed in such a course as shall lead to *one* result. All the instructions given from the bench to the great jury of mankind, have purported that ‘You shall well and truly try, and a *verdict for defendant* give;’—a man was not supposed honest, who contemplated the possibility of the decision being on the other side. Rules were laid down, concerning the frame of mind in which evidence was to be received and gone into,—and touching the cases in which it was meet or not meet that the evidence should be looked into at all,—the whole having a direct bearing on the object stated, of causing the verdict to be for said defendant and for nobody else.

In opposition to all this, stands up the counsel on the other side; and pleads for the sake of the impression he may make on individual opinions, however far he may be from altering the forms of the court or the *dicta* of the judge. And first, of the *importance* of finding out what is truth, even though it should go against the loved defendant.—

‘It is hoped that an honest and fearless endeavour to trace what our duty is in relation to inquiry, will not in the present day be ill received. There is a growing disposition in the world, amongst the intelligent part of it at least, to prize truth and veracity, to look with disdain on all artifice, disingenuity, and disguise, to regard the business of life no longer as an affair which demands unremitted intrigue and perpetual deceit, to consider the great interests of humanity as not requiring to be supported by ignorance and superstition, to believe that suppression and concealment can be of no service, except to the few at the expense of the many, and that every important question should be freely and boldly examined.’—p. 6.

‘That it intimately concerns mankind, that not only the properties of external nature, but the consequences of human actions, the effects of different agencies on our sensibility, the results of the various combinations of society on individual happiness, the relations of man to other beings, should be precisely ascertained and accurately understood, is a proposition so undeniable, when clearly expressed, as barely to escape the character of a truism. The overwhelming importance of this knowledge, is attested by the sad tale of error and suffering, which every page of history presents to our observation. What possible problem can mankind have to solve but one, how to make themselves conjointly as happy, and for that purpose as noble-minded and virtuous as they can during the short term of their mortal existence? And how have they hitherto solved this problem? In what numerous ways have they proved themselves totally blind to their real interests, perverted their resources, exasperated the unavoidable evils of their condition, and inflicted gratuitous and unprofitable misery on each other and on themselves? It is clear that men can have no interest in suffering, no preference for unhappiness in itself, and wherever they are found in headlong career after it, it must be under an impression that they are in pursuit of a different object. It is error therefore, it is illusion, it is an incapacity on their part to see the real consequences of actions, the real issues of events, that gives rise to all those evils which desolate the world, except such as can be traced to the physical circumstances of man’s nature and condition.’*

‘The prevalence of misery, as the consequence of ignorance, shows at once the paramount importance of the pursuit of accurate knowledge. To discover truth, is in fact to do good on a grand scale. The detection of an error, the establishment of a fact, the determination of a doubtful principle, may spread its benefits over large portions of the human race, and be the means of lessening the misery or increasing the happiness of myriads of unborn generations. The great interests of mankind then demand, that the way of discovery should be open, that there should be no obstructions to inquiry, that every facility and encouragement should be given to efforts which are directed to the detection of their errors; and yet one of the greatest discouragements

* “Error is the universal cause of the misery of mankind,” are the first words of Malebranche in his *Treatise on the ‘Search after Truth.’*

which at present exists, is the state of their own moral sentiments. Although he who has achieved the discovery of truth in a matter of importance, has the satisfaction of reflecting that he has conferred a benefit on his fellow-men to which time itself can prescribe no limits, the probability is, that instead of attracting sympathy and gratitude, he will meet with a considerable share of odium and persecution as the consequence of his perspicacity.'—p. 8.

How different is this exordium from the language of the paid philosophers, who see no chance of propping what they call the right, but by the mixture of portions of acknowledged error ;—who wail over the loss of the people's 'instinctive belief' in that which is not, and think nothing harmless which does not include a modicum of falsehood. If a man cannot be made to believe in the divine right of kings, it is better than nothing, to make him believe in a ghost. There is great sympathy among hobgoblins. The days of fairy Puck, were the days of friar Tuck ; and it was incomparably easier to preserve a mental domination over men who feared the cloven foot at every corner of the parish, than over the present generation who defy the devil and all his works, and go doggedly to vote for the man they think will pull down the select vestry. The lovers of fiction do not serve their god for naught. Like the worshippers of Bel, their tracks all point to substantial feeding in the end. Their politics universally smell of their butt of sack, and their best piety has a certain odour of pudding. Whether they speak in their proper persons, or bring a spirit from the deep to be their spokesman, it is always too plain that they are preaching for the pot. All their reasonings are directed to a certain end ; and that end is one closely connected with the power, or the interest, or the prejudices of the reasoners.

For example, when were they known to describe the state of mind desirable in the pursuit of truth as follows ?

'Every one must at once see, that a simple and sincere desire to arrive at the truth, without any predilection in favour of any opinion whatever, and without any other disturbing feeling of affection or dislike, or hope or fear, is the moral state of mind most favourable to the success of inquiry. If a man is possessed with a desire to find a given opinion true, or to confirm himself in a doctrine which he already entertains, he will in all probability pay a partial attention to the arguments and evidence in its favour, to the neglect of opposite considerations ; but if he is free from all wishes of this kind, if he has no predilection to gratify, if his desires are directed solely to the attainment of correct views, he will naturally search for information wherever it is likely to present itself ; he will be without motive for partiality, and susceptible of the full force of evidence.'

'However unaccountable it may at first sight appear, it is a fact,

that few human beings, in their moral, religious, and political inquiries, are possessed with this simple wish of attaining truth : their strongest wishes are directed to the discovery of new grounds for adhering to opinions already formed ; and they are as deaf to arguments on the opposite side as they are alive to evidence in favour of their own views. The pure wish to arrive at truth is indeed as rare as the integrity which strictly observes the golden rule to act towards others as we would wish others to act towards us. For this several reasons may be assigned. A principal one is, that men's interests are often indissolubly connected with the prevalence of certain opinions ; they are therefore naturally anxious to find out every possible ground why these opinions should be held : their personal consequence too is often implicated in their support ; they are pledged by their rank or office, or previous declarations, to the maintenance of a determinate line of argument, and they feel that it would be a disparagement to their intellectual powers and to their reputation, were it proved to be unsound.'—p. 14.

'These, and other similar circumstances, create in the mind a desire to find some given opinion true ; and of course, as far as their influence extends, extinguish the desire to find the truth.'—p. 17.

There can be no doubt that these are the reasons, why the orthodox are every where the orthodox. It matters not whether it be at Constantinople or at Notre Dame ; there is always a way that all right-thinking people fall into.

The next object of the author is to ascertain in what circumstances inquiry is a duty. And he concludes that, without pretending to a complete enumeration, this duty is incumbent on all who can be brought under the following classes ;—

1. 'Those whose professed office it is to teach others.
2. Those who voluntarily undertake to instruct others.
3. All those who have the means and opportunity of inquiry on subjects which have an important bearing on their moral actions or conduct in society.'—p. 25.

'On all persons, who come under these three classes, it may be stated to be incumbent to pursue their inquiries till they can clearly trace satisfactory conclusions from undeniable premises. No one ought to be satisfied with his opinions on any subject of importance, much less ought he to inculcate them on others, unless he can trace their connexion with self-evident principles.'

'It is not easy to imagine how this plain statement can be controverted or denied ; yet there are frequent cases in actual life, where the duty of inquiry, if not positively rejected, is really evaded. There are several pretexts employed on these occasions : inquiry might lead to doubt or perplexity ; to become acquainted with opposite arguments might shake the settled convictions of the understanding ; to read the writings of adversaries might contaminate the mind with false views.'—p. 27.

'There is no foreseeing how far the subtlety of interest and indo-

lence may go, and it may be possibly assigned as a further reason for his declining inquiry, that he may come to some fallacy which he cannot surmount, although convinced of its character. If he is convinced of its character, he must either have grounds for that conviction or not. If he has grounds, let him examine them, draw them out, try if they are valid, and then the fallacy will stand exposed. If he has no grounds for suspecting a fallacy, what an irrational conclusion he confesses himself to have arrived at! But he may reply—he may be unable to solve the difficulty, he may be perplexed, and the issue may be, that it would have been much better had he remained in his former strong though unenlightened conviction. Why better? If he is in perplexity, let him read, think, consult the learned and the wise, and the result will probably be, a definite opinion on one side or the other. But if he still remain in doubt, where is the harm, or rather why is it not to be considered a good? The subject is evidently one which admits strong probabilities on opposite sides. Doubt, therefore, is the proper sentiment with which to regard it: it is the result of the best exercise of the faculties; and either positively to believe, or positively to disbelieve, would imply an erroneous appreciation of evidence.'

'In the minds of some people, a strong prejudice appears to exist against that state of the understanding which is termed doubt. A little reflection, however, will convince any one, that on certain subjects doubt is as appropriate a state of mind as belief or disbelief on others. There are doctrines, propositions, facts, supported and opposed by every degree of evidence, and many amongst them by that degree of evidence of which the proper effect is to leave the mind in an equipoise between two conclusions. In these cases, either to believe or disbelieve would imply that the understanding was improperly affected. Doubt is the appropriate result, which there can be no reason to shrink from or lament.'

'But it is further urged, that inquiry might contaminate the mind with false views; and therefore it is wise and laudable to abstain from it.'

'We can understand what is meant by contaminating a man's habits, or disposition, or even imagination. If a man read impure books, or works of extravagant fiction and false taste, his imagination will inevitably be coloured by the ideas presented, and the conceptions which subsequently rise up in his mind will partake of the impurity and extravagance with which he has been conversant. But there is no analogy on this point between the understanding and the imagination. There is contamination in preposterous and obscene images crowding before the intellectual vision, notwithstanding a full and distinct perception of their character; but there is no contamination, no evil in a thousand false arguments coming before the mind, if their quality is clearly discerned. The only possible evil in this case is mistaking false for true; but the man who shrinks from investigation, lest he should mistake false for true, can have no reason for supposing himself free from that delusion in his actual opinions. That he should be more likely to escape from error without than with investigation, is a species of absurdity which requires no exposure.'

‘On no plea, therefore, can investigation be declined. That it should unsettle a man’s established convictions, or that it should lead to ultimate doubt, may be a good: the one is the necessary preliminary to passing from error to truth; the other, if ultimately produced, is most likely to be the proper state of mind in relation to the particular subject examined. That inquiry should contaminate his mind is also a vain allegation. The only meaning which can be attached to the phrase, implies a misconception of falsehood for truth, a delusion, which inquiry is not only the direct means of preventing, but of dissipating if he is already involved in it.’

‘Whoever fears to examine the foundation of his opinions, and enter on the consideration of any train of counter-argument, *may rest assured, that he has some latent apprehension of their unsoundness and incapacity of standing investigation.* And as a fear of this sort is totally at variance with that spirit of candour and fairness which we have already seen to be the proper disposition for the attainment of truth, no man should suffer it to prevent him from boldly engaging in the requisite examination. A great deal of invective has been levelled at free-thinking. The only distinction worth attending to on this point is that between accurate and inaccurate, true and false. Thinking can never be too free, provided it is just.’—p. 29.

The most remarkable phenomenon attendant on the objections to inquiry, is that the objections which are good at Notre Dame, are equally good at Constantinople, and yet the things defended are not the same. Since, therefore, it is not a common truth, it must be a common interest. There are certain comfortable possessions and holdings at both places, dependent on the supporting a particular state of belief; and though the beliefs are not the same, the orthodoxy is.

Some of the most powerful impediments to inquiry are next stated.—

‘One of these is a fear that we may search too far, and be guilty of presumption in prying into things we ought not to know: another prejudice is, that we may contract guilt should we arrive at erroneous conclusions, or conclusions at variance with such as are established; and another, that it is a sort of praiseworthy humility to acquiesce in received opinions, on the authority of others, and refrain from thinking for ourselves.’

‘A brief space will not be ill bestowed in setting these prejudices in their true light.’

‘As to the first, a few words will suffice to prove that nothing can be more irrational and unfounded. We have shown in another place* that truth is conducive to human happiness; the attainment of it, one of the highest objects of human enterprise; and the free exercise of our faculties on all subjects, the means of securing this invaluable blessing. If this is a correct representation, investigation is a pursuit

* Essay on the Publication of Opinions.

in which there is every thing to hope and nothing to fear, and to which there are no limits but such as the nature of our own faculties prescribes.'

'It is not easy to conceive with exactness what can possibly be apprehended from inquiry; what is the precise danger or difficulty it is expected to involve us in; what is implied in the fear that we may search too far.'

'Some indeed appear to have imagined that inquiry might conduct us to forbidden truths.. As there are secret transactions amongst our superiors in society, or even our associates, which we should be culpable in prying into; sealed documents circulating in the world, sacred to those whose names they bear, and not to be scrutinized with honour by any of the intermediate agents through whose hands they pass; records of private affairs, kept solely for the use of the individuals concerned in them, and which we are not to come upon by stealth, and rife of their information: and as to infringe the privacy of these matters would be stigmatized as indelicate, meddling, presumptuous; so it seems to be supposed that there are closed documents in nature into which we are forbidden to look, private processes going on into which we have no right to intrude, truths existing which are not to be profaned by our scrutiny, and to attempt to make ourselves acquainted with these is unjustifiable audacity and presumption. If this prejudice does not often assume the definite form here ascribed to it, it may frequently be found exerting an influence without a distinct consciousness in the mind over which it prevails.'

'A more striking instance of a completely false analogy could not be adduced. There is not a single point of resemblance throughout the whole field of knowledge to these little secrets, the offspring of human weakness, or the indispensable resources of human imperfection. There is no secret in the natural or the moral world, sacred from the investigation of man. Here there can be no presumption, no undue boldness, no counterpart at all to the audaciousness of one man intruding upon the privacy of another. All that man has to guard against, and that simply for his own sake, is error; his vigilance is required only to ensure that his facts are properly ascertained, and his inferences correctly deduced. The presumption he has to repress, is not any presumption in relation to other beings in possession of secrets, which he is trying clandestinely to wrest from them, but merely the presumption of drawing positive and ample conclusions from doubtful and slender premises, of supposing that he has discovered what he has not, that he has succeeded where he has only failed, that he has done what still remains to be accomplished; in a word, the presumption of over-rating his own achievements. Here indeed a man may err in self-confidence, but an evil cannot obviously arise from searching too far, which is best remedied by searching farther, by closer reasoning and more rigorous investigation.'

'The strangest absurdities indeed would be involved in the supposition that we could possibly reach to knowledge, which we ought not to attain. We are placed in this world by the Creator of the universe,

surrounded with certain objects and endowed with certain faculties. From these objects, with these faculties, it is implied by the hypothesis under consideration, we may extort secrets which he never designed to be known, extract information which Omnipotence wished to withhold !"—p. 35.

In the midst of the objections thrown in the way of inquiry, sufficient weight has scarcely ever been given to the contingency on the opposite side, that the Creator of the universe should at some time demand of his creatures, *how and why*, with such faculties and opportunities as had been bestowed on them, their progress had been so small in the knowledge of what he had placed within their reach ;—why, for example, their opinion of his own nature was in many instances so crude, so gross, and so much at variance with what would constitute a pure and faultless human being. Why should not this be viewed as an extensive danger, as well as the other ? And why should not men make provision for answering this question at their final audit, as well as for establishing their acquiescence in some human creed, and their perfect acquaintance with any given number of articles ?

‘The second prejudice above enumerated, that we may contract guilt if in the course of inquiry we miss the right conclusion, is still more prevalent and influential. On a former occasion* we have shown, that nothing can be more at variance with reason, than an apprehension of this nature. As our opinions on any subject are not voluntary acts but involuntary effects, in whatever conclusions our researches terminate, they can involve us in no culpability. All that we have to take care of, as we shall more largely show hereafter, is to bestow on every subject an adequate and impartial attention. Having done this we have discharged our duty, and it would be irrational and unmanly to entertain any apprehension for the result.’

‘In fact, there is the grossest inconsistency in the prejudice now under consideration. If we may contract guilt by inquiry, we may contract guilt by remaining in our present state. The only valid reason which can be assigned, why we may commit an offence by embarking in any inquiry is, that we may miss the right conclusion ; but it is obvious that we may equally miss it by remaining in our actual opinions. It is then incumbent on us to know, whether we are committing an offence by remaining in our present opinions ; in other words, it is necessary to inquire whether these opinions are true ; thus the reason assigned for not inquiring, leads itself to the conclusion that it is necessary to inquire.’—p. 40.

‘A man, indeed, after the best and most dispassionate investigation of an important subject, may naturally feel a degree of anxiety lest he should after all have missed the truth ; but in this anxiety there is

* Essay on the Formation of Opinions.

not, or ought not to be, the slightest admixture of moral uneasiness. It is an anxiety, lest his conclusions, when they come to form the ground of his actions or of his instructions to others, should lead to consequences which he did not anticipate. His conclusions may be wrong, and the consequences disastrous ; but if he has a proper view of the matter, there will be none of the stings of remorse, not the faintest accusation of conscience. Having inquired to the best of his power, he has done all that depended on himself, and would exhibit little wisdom were he to torment himself with reproaches for an unfortunate issue.'—p. 41.

'The third prejudice we have to consider is, that acquiescence in received opinions, or forbearing according to the common phrase to think for ourselves, evinces a degree of humility highly proper and commendable.'

'If we examine the matter closely, nevertheless, we shall find that it usually evinces nothing but a great degree of indolent presumption or intellectual cowardice. There is often, in truth, as great a measure of presumption in this species of acquiescence as in the boldest hypothesis which the human invention can start. That received or established opinions are true, is one of those sweeping conclusions, which would require very strong reasons and often elaborate research to justify it. On what grounds are they considered to be true by one who declines investigation ? Because (on the most favourable supposition) they have been handed down to us by our predecessors, and have been regarded with conviction by a multitude of illustrious men. But what comprehensive reasons are these ! What investigation would it require to show they were valid ! As the whole history of mankind teems with instances of the transmission of the grossest errors from one generation to another, and of their having been countenanced by the concurrence of the most eminent of the race ; what a large acquaintance with the peculiarities of the generations preceding us, and the circumstances of the great men to whom we appeal, it would require to show that this particular instance was an exemption from the general lot !'

'It is then no humility to refrain from inquiry ; on the contrary, it is the proper kind of humility ; or if it is not humility it is the proper feeling for the occasion, to be determined to do all in our power to make ourselves acquainted with every subject on which it is necessary for us to pronounce or profess an opinion.'—p. 42.

'Let the inquirer then enter on his task with full confidence that he is embarking in no criminal, or forbidden, or presumptuous undertaking. Let him be as circumspect as he pleases in collecting his facts and deducing his conclusions, cautious in the process, but fearless in the result. Let him be fully aware of his liability to error, of the thousand sources of illusion, of the limited powers of the individual, of the paramount importance of truth ; but let him dismiss all conscientious apprehensions of the issue of an investigation, conducted with due application of mind and rectitude of purpose.'—p. 46.

The next chapter is on the duties incumbent on mankind in the process of inquiry. These are reduced to two; examination, in the first place, of the state of our own minds in reference to the subject of inquiry; and secondly, examination of the subject itself, and of the evidence appertaining to it. The notion that it is a man's duty to believe certain prescribed doctrines, is combated in a manner that might entitle the author to the epithet of *malleus anti-hereticorum*. There is no man who has ever been offended by the virulence of orthodoxy, or tempted to needless disbelief by the puerility of its general style of argument, who will not exult in the clear and complete statement here presented, of what has with more or less distinctness passed through his own mind upon the subject, though he lacked the power to form it into a connected whole.

The chapter on the influence of the institutions and practices of society on the pursuit of truth, classes among the most prominent of the retarding causes, the institutions which bestow emolument on individuals with the stipulation that they teach certain doctrines definitively prescribed, and in fact the annexation of any advantage whatever, whether by positive institution or by the habits of the community, to any particular opinions. To these may be added the converse of the same form of injustice; which is the annexation of suffering or loss, as the consequence of deciding in a certain way—or persecution. Both are equally opposed to the attainment of the truth; though in different manners. Bribery attracts men's decision from the right; persecution rivets it upon the wrong.

The concluding chapter is on the spirit in which the results of inquiry ought to be communicated and received. It may be considered as a kind of Review of Reviews, and it is difficult to imagine that the author had not in sight some case in which he has individually suffered from the petulance of criticism.

The second essay is a dialogue between *A* and *N* on the Progress of Knowledge. *N* is a dissatisfied, complaining kind of consonant, who takes something very much like a Tory view of the advances and prospects of the human race. *A* is a more cheerful and open-hearted vocable, and stands up stoutly for the opinion that 'intellect' has 'marched,' is marching, and will continue to march rapidly in spite of all that can be done to hinder it. *N* however cannot help kindling, on coming to the invention of printing; though he still indulges himself in a belief, that the progress must on the whole be slow. *A* opposes him, and *N* again relaxes into a ghastly smile on the mention of political economy. 'Twenty or thirty years ago the doctrines of Adam Smith were apparently a dead letter; his book was

considered by that sapient race, the practical men, as full of Utopian dreams. Pitt did not fully comprehend it, and Fox declared it past understanding. A first-rate statesman in the present day would be scouted for equal ignorance. The prevalence of this science will do good. It is a lever which will move the world.' The consonant is clearly no Tory; he speaks moreover but lightly of the 'collective wisdom,' and his speech was indited before the fatal minority on the Catholic question. In a subsequent conversation he turns out little better than a Radical;—believes that a progress in literature and science must be accompanied by progressive changes in our social and political institutions;—thinks—the traitor—that a glance at the misery around us is sufficient to show they have not arrived at perfection;—opines that the tendency of political change is now evidently to republicanism, and it is not unlikely that the existing governments of Europe will gradually approximate to the form adopted in the United States of America. He admits that form to be at present unsuitable to the feelings and habits of Europeans, which still retain a strong tinge of the spirit of the middle ages. But there are certain principles, he maintains, which are making daily advances, and which in proportion as they subvert the ancient spirit of hereditary attachment, will render it unnecessary and substitute a better in its place. Such, he says, are the principles, that government is for the benefit of the whole community;—that to ensure the attainment of this end, the will of the majority ought to prevail;—that to secure the benefits of government, the people must strictly conform to the regulations which they themselves have imposed; and the corollaries flowing from these propositions. From these opinions *A* dissents; with a view, no doubt, to prevent a prosecution from the Constitutional Association. And his opponent, having done all the mischief he can, is not anxious at present to discuss the merits of any forms of government; all he means to contend for is, that whichever is really the best must in the natural course of improvement establish its claims to preference. It is difficult to deny that there is something astute in the deportment of this last-mentioned disputant. Nevertheless the dialogue is one of the most valuable that has been carried on among the letters of the alphabet, since the remote period of the grand confederation against Apple-pie.

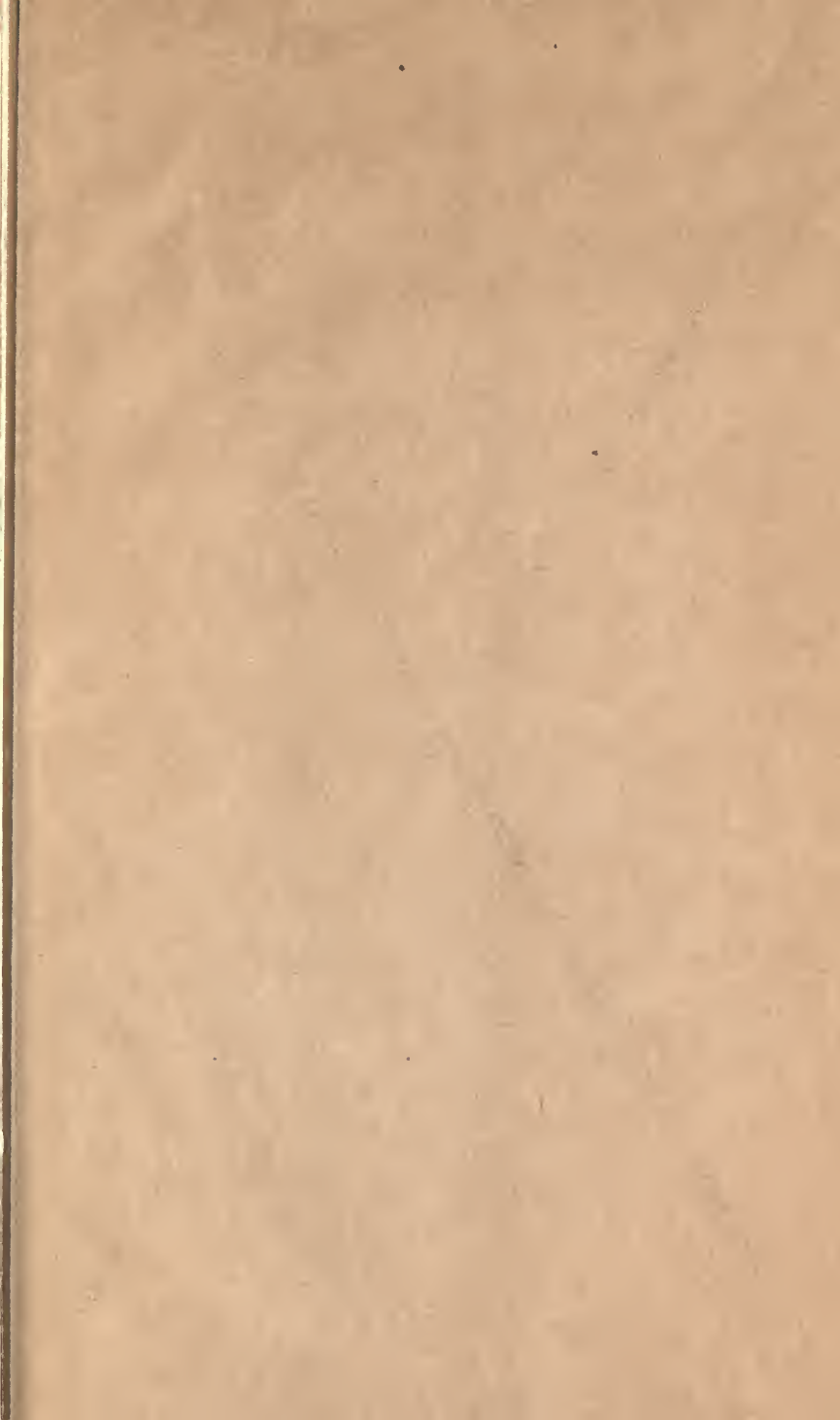
The third and last Essay is on the Principle of Evidence and Expectation. This principle is stated to be, the assumption or belief of the 'uniformity of causation;' or in other words, the persuasion that the causes which have produced certain effects in time past, will produce effects of the same kind hereafter. *A*

chapter is devoted to the demonstration, that the uniformity of causation cannot be established by experience or testimony. It appears certain that it cannot be fully and completely established, even with relation to past events; and for the simple reason, that we have not experience or testimony on the subject of all that is past. The true result therefore seems to be, that our confidence in the uniformity of causation is only dependent upon the high degree of improbability of its being interrupted at the present moment, or within any narrow period. No man can positively say, that the earth will not be destroyed by a comet next Christmas. But the fact that the earth to our certain knowledge has existed some thousand years without being destroyed by a comet, makes it at all events great odds, that if it is destroyed it will not be next Christmas. Whether it will be destroyed in six thousand or in sixty thousand years more, are chances for the valuation of which the data are manifestly imperfect. We know enough of the planetary system to know of an apparent possibility, that in strict conformity to the known laws of nature, and without any breach of the connection between causes and effects which has existed during the few thousand years of our acquaintance with the earth, a comet should at some time run foul of our planet, as two vessels run foul of each other at sea. Such an event would not be an interruption of the uniformity of causation, but a new developement of its tendencies. But since there is experimental proof that the danger is not of frequent recurrence, the chances are very great that the vessel will last our time. In the same way if any other event should take place exceedingly different from any thing that has been witnessed in the world before, the just inference would be, that there had existed sources of causation which had been concealed from us. It is impossible to be certain that we have exhausted all the phenomena of causation; there may be causes whose tendency it is to operate in a cycle of a million of centuries, and to which the world's experience bears only the same proportion as half an hour to a year. At the same time the world's experience goes to demonstrate, that the height of human folly is to believe any thing that is not proved, or any thing merely because it is not proved that it will not be. We must go by the experience of our half hour, though it is but half an hour; and when it pleases heaven to give us more, we will go by that.

ART. XII.—*Devereux*. 3 Vols. By the Author of *Pelham*, &c. 1829.

HOWEVER variously the dominion of gifted minds over the faculty of imagination may be exercised, one grand two-fold division will embrace the operation of the whole. The first and the most important of these departments, comprises that plastic species of intellect, which may be termed the assumptive, or more properly still, the assimilative. Like the dervise in the Persian tale, it can make excursions at will, and almost instinctively animate any assignable modification of humanity, or even of conceivable existence. The second not unfrequently includes an equal portion of mental vigour, but being more deeply tinged with thought, and imbued with the feelings and convictions of the individual, may not inaptly take the name of the self-emanative or reflective. Proceeding a little further in the way of analysis, the former seems to imply a tendency to deal with perceptions chiefly as *materiel* for conceptions, and the latter, to indicate a proneness to ponder over them, with a view to conclusions, or opinions. A little consideration of these habitudes might lead *à priori* to a conviction, that the creative or combinative principle, at least as to an able dealing with sensible images and impressions, must be much more active in the one class of mind, than the other, the possessors of which almost involuntarily fall into prevalent trains of idea, so as gradually to become slaves to them. Such indeed is felt to be the fact as regards works of imagination in general, but particularly those of the dramatist and novelist, and public approbation has for a long time past been awarded accordingly.

The foregoing remarks have been rendered prefatory to a brief notice of another novel by the author of *Pelham*, partly because as a writer of considerable power, feeling, and literary aptitude, he stands among the foremost of the prose fictionists of the hour, and partly because he forms a conspicuous example of the truth of the specified theory. For instance, while possessed of most of the secondary attributes in an eminent degree, he is anything but spontaneously or felicitously inventive. A choice of subject singularly adapted to the writer's taste, associations, and experience, might, so far as regards *Pelham*, have inspired a doubt of this fact; but even in that very happy production, a something of this truth was discernible, and the "*Disowned*" and "*Devereux*," have put the real state of the case beyond question. Like Byron, Wordsworth, Southey, and many more who have merited and received the homage due to genius, he cannot sufficiently escape from himself, and his predominant





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